



wood turtle

Clemmys insculpta

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Chordata - vertebrates
Class: Reptilia
Order: Testudines
Family: Emydidae

Features

Wood turtles are up to 7 1/2 inches long. The shell appears to have been sand blasted from coarse-grained wood. Each year's growth adds a layer under the unshed growth of the previous year's scales, giving a pyramidal appearance to the scales of the carapace (upper shell). The carapace is brown with a keel (ridge) that's especially prominent toward the tail of the turtle. The plastron (lower shell) is bright yellow with black blotches near the tail end of the marginal (edge) scales, except the two near the neck where the blotches are toward the front end of the scales. The lower shell is not hinged. Males and older females have orange on the neck and lower portions of the front legs. (The lower shells of Blanding's and red-eared turtles have similar markings, but neither has the "sculptured" carapace, and the lower shell of the Blanding's turtle is hinged.)

Natural History

Wood turtles spend most of their time on land, but they feed and hibernate in water. They more often are seen in the timber, rather than in a river or pond. They eat both terrestrial and aquatic plants and insects along with occasional dead

fish, earthworms, or snails. Wood turtles are prized as pets because they are docile and intelligent. Only a few struggling populations are found in Iowa in the northern limits of the Cedar River and lower portion of the Shell Rock River drainages, so it is listed as endangered in Iowa as well as in several other states.

Habitats

bottomland timber; interior rivers and streams

Iowa Status

endangered, native

The wood turtle has maze-learning ability nearly equal to that of rats. Its high intelligence and pleasant personality may be one of the reasons it has suffered so much at the hands of man. They are still prized as pets.

Iowa Range

upper reaches of Cedar and Shell Rock River drainages

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.